



Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions

Catherine Bell

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From handshakes and toasts to chant and genuflection, ritual pervades our social interactions and religious practices. Still, few of us could identify all of our daily and festal ritual behaviors, much less explain them to an outsider. Similarly, because of the variety of activities that qualify as ritual and their many contradictory yet, in many ways, equally legitimate interpretations, ritual seems to elude any systematic historical and comparative scrutiny. In this book, Catherine Bell offers a practical introduction to ritual practice and its study; she surveys the most influential theories of religion and ritual, the major categories of ritual activity, and the key debates that have shaped our understanding of ritualism. Bell refuses to nail down ritual with any one definition or understanding. Instead, her purpose is to reveal how definitions emerge and evolve and to help us become more familiar with the interplay of tradition, exigency, and self-expression that goes into constructing this complex social medium.

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